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OSCE and NATO: Complementary or Competitive Security Providers for Europe?

*A Long Range Perspective*¹

When they are viewed in ideal terms, NATO (the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and OSCE (the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) each represent half of a comprehensive European security organization. NATO, with nineteen members in March 1999, organizes armed forces to deter aggression and to undertake peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions in Europe. The OSCE, with a more comprehensive membership of 55 states, has come to specialize in conflict prevention and in post-conflict peace-building - elections, police, and civil administration. Today, both organizations are deeply involved in the struggle over Kosovo.

It is fairly evident, whatever the outcome of the dispute over Kosovo and over the treatment of the Kosovars, that both organizations will continue into the future. But NATO, which is conducting a military action against Serbia, risks much more with its Kosovo involvement than the OSCE, which thus far has a subordinate role. If NATO can cope with the Kosovar refugees, bring them back to Kosovo into relatively tolerable material conditions, reach an understanding with Serbia to allow Kosovo far-reaching autonomy within Serbia and can provide an effective peacekeeping contingent to assure implementation of this agreement, its prestige as it enters the next century will be high; OSCE's repute is likely to be carried along with that of NATO. If NATO fails in significant respects on Kosovo, the damage to European and Transatlantic unity will be great and the ensuing debate over NATO's proper role and that of the OSCE is likely to continue for years. In this situation, the general feasibility of multilateral military actions in support of human rights will also be placed in question.

Even if the Kosovo crisis ultimately subsides, whether favourably or not, these two halves of an ideal European security organization, NATO and OSCE, are not likely to come together anytime soon to form a single, comprehensive institution. As already indicated, the current state of productive coexistence has not always characterized relations between the two organizations. During the Cold War years, the main role of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, as the OSCE was called prior to 1995, was to promote discussion and negotiation between East and West. This role was

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questioned by some in the West, but ultimately supported as a vehicle for promoting Western political views in Warsaw Pact states. At that point, CSCE was considered a potentially useful but not essential complement to NATO, which was charged with the main responsibility for defending Europe.

This slightly tense but productive relationship suddenly changed for the worse with the end of the Cold War. American political leaders, concerned over the possibility of an isolationist resurgence in American political opinion, urgently wanted to maintain the pre-eminent influence in Europe that they had exercised through NATO during the Cold War. These fears of isolationism proved somewhat misdirected. Traditional American isolationism did not show major increases, but instead appeared transmuted into a modern post-Cold War version, American unilateralism. Nevertheless, the concerns of the U.S. administration about NATO were justified. In the years before the United States' reluctant 1995 decision to become directly involved in peacekeeping in Bosnia, NATO had only a residual function of insuring against the distant possibility of a revived Russian threat. It was being vigorously criticized for failure to play a more constructive role in the conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia, and more and more considered an expensive and useless relic of a past confrontation. The ultimate result was the energetic campaign for NATO enlargement.

In this situation, even a faltering OSCE appeared a potential threat to NATO's survival, and U.S. officials went on the offensive against it. For example, the November 1990 CSCE decision establishing a Council of Foreign Ministers agreed that the Council would meet only once a year. Despite urgent efforts, as Yugoslavia was coming apart and as conflicts broke out in Moldova, Georgia and Azerbaijan, the CSCE was unable to agree on a procedure for convening its Council on an emergency basis. The United States firmly opposed such emergency procedures; the National Security Council staff under General Brent Scowcroft was of the steadfast view that NATO - and only NATO - was the right organization for managing crises in Europe. It took six more months until the June 1991 CSCE Foreign Ministers' meeting in Berlin, for an emergency procedure to be agreed upon. Again, from November 1990, the date of the Charter of Paris formally ending the Cold War, up to the CSCE Foreign Ministers' meeting in late 1993, the United States opposed the establishment in Vienna of a permanent committee of middle ranking officials from CSCE States to deal with emergencies - all this despite Secretary of State Baker's statement in April 1990 that the two organizations were complementary. Finally, the United States realized both that CSCE was performing useful work and was too weak to be a serious challenge to NATO. Washington then shifted its repressive activities to WEU,

also a weak rival to NATO, until it finally realized that NATO's real long-term rival was the European Union itself.

There were other reasons for the United States administration's restraint towards the OSCE, among them, consensus voting in which the United States is only one of a current total of 55 participating States. There is consensus voting in NATO, too, but American pre-eminence in NATO is not vigorously challenged, as that pre-eminence is challenged by France, Russia and others in the OSCE. The United States has also opposed recurrent European moves towards supranational obligations for the OSCE, moves expressed, for example, in the effort to convert "politically binding" OSCE executive agreements into treaties and in the OSCE Court of Conciliation and Arbitration successfully established by European participating States despite American opposition. Successive U.S. administrations have considered this tendency to provide a treaty base for the OSCE as a potential challenge to U.S. national sovereignty. (In reality, they have feared that the U.S. Senate would reject OSCE treaties on the grounds that they impaired U.S. sovereignty, leaving the U.S. relationship with OSCE weaker than if the treaty route had never been tried.) For Russia, too, another security organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), has been of more direct importance than the OSCE. Germany and France give natural priority to the European Union. But Russia recognizes that the OSCE gives it a legitimate voice and role in European security issues, while the EU member states recognize the value of an organization that protects the political and economic environment of the EU and assists in preparing new members for admission to the EU.

Moreover, the fact that the major powers involved in European security give priority to other organizations has not prevented them from making increasing use of the OSCE, which indeed is both indispensable and unequalled in the intensity of its efforts at conflict prevention and post-conflict peacebuilding and in its function as an organizational framework for very valuable force reduction and confidence-building agreements. OSCE activities in building democratic institutions and strengthening human rights, its pioneering work on protecting national minorities, and its often risky field operations in former Yugoslavia and eight former Soviet republics have been valuable and innovative. OSCE long-term missions in places like Latvia and Moldova have been especially useful for conflict prevention and resolution and improved majority-minority relations.

These types of missions are essential to the maintenance of peace in Europe and, in practical terms, NATO could not attempt them. Here is true complementarity. True, the United Nations could possibly perform functions like these, but the UN lacks the OSCE's advantage of being a European regional organization closer to the problem and probably more capable of mobilizing large numbers of civilian officials or former officials.

Especially in the former Yugoslavia, as monitor of sanctions and elections in Bosnia, as provider of police in Slavonia and of verifiers, police, and administration in Kosovo, the OSCE has complemented NATO peacekeeping and will doubtless also play a key role in a post-conflict Kosovo. This complementarity has not been without some cost to the OSCE. Through the Partnership for Peace, NATO has taken over earlier OSCE programmes for promoting civil control of the military and for training for peacekeeping.

In general, the OSCE remains under-governed, under-financed, and understaffed for its increasing functions, while NATO still receives far greater funds from its member states. OSCE decision-making remains weak - medium and small participating States sensitive to the possibility of big power domination continue to reject establishment of a smaller circle of countries whose officials could at least prepare major decisions for consensus decision by the full OSCE membership. The OSCE is not strong enough to absorb NATO, nor does NATO want to dilute its cohesion by absorbing the much larger membership of the OSCE, so these two halves of an ideal European security organization will remain separate institutions for many years to come - although not necessarily forever. However, NATO-OSCE rivalry could resume if NATO fails in Kosovo and is weakened by criticism arising from that failure. In that event, debate would resume over whether NATO, the OSCE, or the European Union should be the pre-eminent security organization in Europe.

The Future

It looks as though both NATO and the OSCE will endure over the next couple of decades. During that period, under worst-case assumptions, Russia, still with a large nuclear arsenal, might be a resurgent problem under a nationalistic fascist government. Control of Egypt and also of Turkey could be seized by radical Islamists, finally providing the cohesion and leadership for an Islamist alliance of North Africa and the Near East hostile to Western countries and controlling the oil supplies of the Persian Gulf. Even if they do not actually take place, the possibility of worst-case contingencies like these will keep NATO alive and funded over coming decades. The states of the Balkans, the Caucasus and Central Asia could provide enough turmoil and bloodshed to keep both NATO and OSCE active in conflict prevention, peacekeeping and post-conflict peace-building during the same period.

NATO member states had prepared a revised Strategic Concept which was approved at the celebration of NATO's fiftieth anniversary in April 1999. There had been some disagreement about parts of the Concept which imply possible NATO deployment to the Persian Gulf or North Africa. But, prior to

Kosovo, there was no serious disagreement about using NATO forces for peacekeeping on the periphery of NATO members' territory. Nor is there any question about the continued need for OSCE conflict prevention, peacebuilding and arms control roles. So both organizations will probably continue in their complementary roles until the struggle over Kosovo has subsided. Then, depending on the outcome, NATO's peacekeeping role could be questioned and OSCE loaded with further responsibilities.

Today, the only serious disagreement over security roles in Europe comes when discussing the future organizational shape of the OSCE. Russia has not given up completely on its effort to build OSCE as the pre-eminent security organization in Europe through its project for a Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the twenty-first century. The expanded organization foreseen by Russia would control NATO peacekeeping and security policy and block further expansion of NATO. But the inability of Russian foreign policy to mount a consistent, enduring coalition-building effort in favour of this project has made it easy for the United States to drain the substance out of this effort, now inoffensively known as the Document-Charter on European Security. The project has been reduced to a set of anodyne principles.

Despite resolute pruning by the U.S. and the United Kingdom, however, the vision of a bigger, better OSCE remains alive in the background, kept alive by France, Italy, Spain and the smaller European countries. This is the vision of the ideal regional security organization for Europe, a more effective League of Nations, with universal membership, treaty-based, more powerful, better financed than today's OSCE, capable of deciding rapidly on complicated issues, and with strong peacekeeping forces at its disposal whose deployment it can rapidly order, a Europe-based organization which the United States supports but does not attempt to dominate.

This is a logical ideal. Something closer to this ideal European regional security organization may actually emerge, perhaps by the middle of the next century. But when it does, it is likely to be called the European Union, not the OSCE.

Growth of the European Union

As with the OSCE and NATO, early 1999 was a time of trial for the European Union. The European Monetary Union entered into effect at the beginning of the year and in March, the entire European Commission, headed by its President, Jacques Santer, felt compelled to resign amid charges of corruption, nepotism and slipshod conduct of affairs. In spite of these difficulties, it is probable that, by 2010, the European Union will have moved into

successful completion of the European Monetary Union. At that point, the first phase of Eastern enlargement of the EU will be under way, with Estonia, Slovenia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus accepted as new EU members, or on the verge of acceptance. The second group of candidates for EU membership - including Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria - will have passed the first hurdles of membership. European economic prosperity and better support for OSCE's conflict prevention methods may have reduced the number of local conflicts in Europe. By this time, Russia too may have calmed somewhat, although its political future will probably still remain uncertain.

The European Union already has a larger population and a larger GDP than the United States. Under the favourable assumptions used here, this difference is likely to gradually widen in favour of the EU. The European Union will continue to move slowly towards the Common Foreign and Defence Policy which is its official aim. When the Union achieves the capability to reach rapid effective decisions on tough foreign policy and security, this objective will have been achieved, and the European Union will be on the path to superpower status.

That point is a long way off and, for the next two decades or so, the European Union is likely to remain an awkward mix of federal and confederal characteristics. In the lengthy interim, Washington is likely to maintain U.S. leadership in the Europe-Atlantic security arena.

However, European restiveness over American pre-eminence in this area is likely to increase and eruptions of serious friction may become more frequent. NATO itself will have become progressively Europeanized as regards senior positions, with Europeans filling nearly all of its key military and civilian positions. During this period, the framework of formal United States-European Union consultation may become more important than United States-European consultation in NATO.

By 2030, all the candidate members for membership may well have joined the EU. Even an increasingly democratic Russia might be included; through membership in the EU, Russia will finally have opened up a continuing, consistent source of investment, development and modernization for the Russian economy. The issue of Turkish membership may be favourably resolved.

If general trends in Europe are moderately favourable, by the time this stage of completed enlargement is reached, 20 years or more from now, the European Union may be both strong enough and sufficiently concerned about long-term security issues affecting Europe to have finally put together the two halves of an ideal European security organization, the OSCE and NATO, absorbing both into the EU structure as subordinated and co-ordinated components of the European Union itself.